



Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
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SAMHSA ***News Release***

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Admissions for Drug Treatment Up for Older Adults SAMHSA and FDA Start New Ad Campaign—Do the Right Dose

Admissions for substance abuse treatment increased by 32 percent among older adults over the eight-year period 1995-2002, concludes a new study released today by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

The report, “Older Adults in Substance Abuse Treatment: Update”, found that the percent of older adults with opiates as their primary substance of abuse increased from 6.8 percent to 12 percent in this time period. Opiates include prescription pain medications and heroin. Opiates are the second most frequent reason for treatment admissions among older adults, after alcohol.

To counter the upward trend in the abuse of opiates, SAMHSA and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) are sponsoring new advertisements to encourage older adults to “Do The Right Dose” when using prescription pain relievers.

“We are only beginning to realize the pervasiveness of substance abuse among older adults,” SAMHSA Administrator Charles Curie said. “We have made older adults a priority at SAMHSA and we are working to advance understanding of the relationship between aging and substance abuse, and to provide practical information for incorporating our understanding into treatment services. Through the materials we are releasing today, we are reaching out now to older adults to warn them that prescription pain relievers are safe and effective when used correctly, but could lead to abuse and addiction if misused.”

“FDA collaborated with SAMHSA to develop these public education materials because our agencies have a shared goal to communicate accurate health information on the proper use of prescription pain medications,” said FDA Deputy Commissioner for Operations Dr. Janet Woodcock. “While SAMHSA’s data indicate significant growth in opiate abuse, we are just as concerned about those cases of addiction to pain medications that go underdiagnosed. We want to send a clear message to older adults that emphasizes the need to take pain relievers as directed.”

The “Do The Right Dose” campaign includes two print ads, one television public service announcement, 2 radio public service announcements, two posters, and an update of SAMHSA’s brochure “As You Age.” The campaign will strive to educate older adults that prescription pain medications are safe and effective when used correctly, but if misused, could lead to addiction or other problems.

(more)

Alcohol is still the primary substance of abuse among older adults, but the proportion of older admissions reporting alcohol as their primary substance declined from 86.5 percent in 1995 to 77.5 percent in 2002. Drug admissions among those ages 55 and older increased by 106 percent for men and 119 percent for women between 1995 and 2002.

The “Do The Right Dose” campaign also has the support of the Administration on Aging, which works to warn older adults that medicine must be taken appropriately and dosages cannot be altered by patients without consequences.

“The Administration on Aging (AoA) is proud of its collaboration with other federal agencies such as SAMHSA and FDA to help in providing older Americans with key information that will help them in their fight against substance abuse,” said Assistant Secretary Josefina G. Carbonell. “Educating older Americans about management of prescription drugs is a critical component in lowering substance abuse among our elders.”

The report is available on the web at www.oas.samhsa.gov/aging.htm. The “As You Age” brochure is available from SAMHSA’s clearinghouse at 1-800-729-6686 or www.ncadi.samhsa.gov. The posters, print Public Service Announcements and other materials are on line at asyouage.samhsa.gov/dotherightdose.

SAMHSA, a public health agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, is the lead federal agency for improving the quality and availability of substance abuse prevention, addiction treatment and mental health services in the United States.